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**Support services for the biological family -
prevention of placement of a child in foster care**

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Situation in the Czech Republic

- Interruption of the development of social work for 40 years.
- Lack of preventive services in child care.
- Many children in institutions - from newborns.
- Lack of funds for prevention, expensive residential services.
- Fragmentation of leadership
- There is no base system of early detection.

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Who – what is Amalthea

- it is 18 years old, so it is just adult.
- It operates in the Pardubice region
- 2 centers - Chrudim, Ústí nad Orlicí
- Services for 120 biological and 80 foster-kinship families per year
- It also deals with the area of pre-school education of disadvantaged children
- 30 employees

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Our beginnings

- The services for foster parents were created first, followed by services for biological families.
- Services for foster parents were voluntary - motivation, support.
- Foster care was not honored.
- Awareness that without the help to biological families, the situation of children will not improve.
- Effort to connect with local Departments of Social Legal Protection.
- Cooperation with LUMOS, foreign internships, inspiration.

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Where we are now – The story of 8 years old Maruška

The family consists of a mother, stepfather and 4 younger siblings. They live in an excluded locality, in a small apartment, they have moved repeatedly. The father works occasionally and illegally, the mother is on parental leave for 8 years.

The family is in debt, they do not pay their debts. They do not come up with money, they owe rent, sometimes they do not even have basic food or medicine.

Maruška goes to the third grade and already to the third school. She is not doing well at school, she lags behind her classmates, she has not completed pre-school education. Her parents don't help her with school.

Maruška has no friends, at school her children make fun of her for her Roma origin, missing equipment or old and dirty clothes. She is tired at school, sometimes falls asleep during classes.

She did not have school meals, the theft of snacks for her classmates was solved. She does not attend any leisure activities, the family does not have the finances for joint school events, so Maruška does not participate in them.

The father often consumes alcohol, followed by quarrels in the household, accompanied by mutual violence. The mother is exhausted from the care of 4 children, the father is not involved. Sometimes a mother uses corporal punishment against children.

The family entered local Departments of Social Legal Protection records after neighbors called the police for domestic violence. Conflicts have proven to be common, with children witnessing them. Neglect of school attendance in the 2 oldest children also became apparent.

The social worker offered the mother a support service to settle the situation in the family and not endanger the children. The father was fundamentally opposed, and the mother did not want to cooperate with anyone. She has not had good experience with social workers in the past.

Co jsme dělali:

1) Motivation

- Contact with all family members.
- Focus on the mother, whom the family situation did not suit and wanted a better life for the children.
- Use of motivational elements, after 3 visits she agreed to cooperate.
- The worker made contact with all the children, including the youngest 2-year-old.
- When the mother saw the worker talking to the children, she was no longer so afraid of working together.

2) Evaluation

- Situation mapping, risk assessment and family strengths.
- Determination of conditions by Departments of SLP.
- Analysis.
- Setting basic goals - together with the family.
- Risks: the child is involved in domestic violence - it is related to the father's use of alcohol; instability - imminent loss of housing, frequent school changes; the child does not develop according to his abilities.
- Strengths: strong emotional bond between children and mother, good relationships between siblings, mother's interest in resolving the situation and cooperation with professionals, the existence of a wider family.

3) Planning

- Together with the family (mother) the basic goals are set:
- conflict minimization,
- creating a plan to ensure the safety of children,
- non-use of corporal punishment
- financial and thus housing stabilization,
- child development - in cooperation with the school
- The father avoids, rejecting offers for support programs for dependents.

4) Own family support

- regular visits of social worker,
- strengthening the mother's competencies (including self-confidence to solve the situation with a partner),
- work with children and their situation in parents' conflicts,
- Maruška development (incl. education support)
- mother

Interactive case conference (IPK)

How children in the family feel

what they would need

what Maruška would need at school to thrive better and feel better there.

Participation: mother, children, soc. worker, class teacher, educational counselor

Family group conference (FGC)

How to ensure the safety of children,

how to help a mother take care of children,

how to support Maruška at school and in free time.

5) The End of support

- The cooperation lasted 1.5 years.
- The situation has stabilized, conflicts are not common, the father took a job and thus the family's financial situation improved.
- Maruška has improved in school, she is in a leisure circle, she has new friends. He will continue tutoring.
- The offered therapeutic support was not used by the mother and Maruška, the offer remains open.
- The father failed to get involved, the problem with alcohol persists, but he still manages to keep his job. However, it respects the needs of children more and stays away from home if they drink.

What we consider important:

- Situation mapping
- Work with motivation
- Emphasis on the situation of children and work with them.
- Focus on the greatest threats - violence, corporal punishment, conflict.
- Finding support resources - for parents and children.
- Involvement of the extended family.
- Participation of family and children in solving their situation.

What needs to be improved:

- Focus on strengths.
- Setting conditions - formulating a fundamental problem.
- Participation - involvement of children, extended families.
- Balance of support and control.
- Cooperation - Departments of Social Legal Protection, NGO, school and health facilities.

Discussion:

- What comes to your mind about the story? Would you do something different?
- How do you perceive the participation of family and children?
- What is the optimal cooperation between Local authorities and NGO?
- What tools do you use in your work and what is your experience with them?
- What do you perceive as strengths / weaknesses in family support?
- How do you think the support of families in the Czech Republic should / can improve?

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Thank you for your attention.

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